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ABSTRACT

Ways in which elementary and junior high school teachers can use the My Class Inventory (MCI) to assess their students' views of classroom climate are discussed. The climate of a group is defined as the quality of the internal environment that persists over time and is experienced by members of the group. The short form of the MCI, which is considered the most appropriate climate instrument for young children, consists of 25 statements, with five statements each for the dimensions of satisfaction, friction, competition, difficulty, and cohesion. Research indicates that each of these dimensions is related to learning in classrooms. Teachers can use profiles of classroom climate as a basis for thinking about ways to improve the learning environment and increase student achievement. Guidelines for administering the measure to students are offered. (RH)

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How Are We Doing? Why Not Ask The Kids: Measuring Climate in Kindergarten and Primary Classrooms

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Measuring Climate in Kindergarten
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> Following a short morning routine, the children in Mrs. Bradford's class gather on the rug for the morning "lesson". This morning Mrs. Bradford reads a story, reminding the children to "pay close attention to the pictures and the words." Most of the chidren sit in their places listening quietly. One child talks to his neighbor. Mrs. Bradford reminds him that he is bothering his neighbor and writes his name on the board with minimal disruption to the lesson.
>
> Following the story, the chidren are asked to recall instances from the story that "could really happen and those that couldn't." One child says that "a cake couln't be a monster." Another child raises his hand and asks, "What's a cob web?" Mrs. Bradford says that she's glad he asked and explains that "it's a spider web." Several other children share ideas, which are warmly received.
>
> Following the discussion, each child is given a piece of paper and asked to "draw one thing that is real and one that is make-believe." Each child selects a table, and starts to work.
>
> The children work with little interruption from the teacher and when finished select an activity from the shelves in the room. (Fuqua, 1985)

Things seem to be going well in this classroom. The teacher responds to the children in a warm, caring way, most children are on task, lessons are planned and organized with objectives clearly in mind, and the presentation is enjoyable. To evaluate the effectiveness of this classroom, we might test the children to determine how well they are learning. We might observe, as I have done, and make a determination on the quality of instruction. We might even ask the principal to rate this teacher and her

effectiveness. In this effort, however, we would be overlooking the most important source of feedback for evaluation, the children. In fact in evaluating schools and classrooms, we rarely ask for children's opinions even though effective school research indicates that children's perception of classroom climate is highly correlated with school success (Mackenzie, 1983; McGrail, 1986).

We asked the children in Mrs. Bradford's classroom about their classroom climate. This article will describe what we did and what we found out.

Measuring Classroom Climate

The climate of a group has been defined as the quality of the internal environment that persists over time and is experienced by its members (Taguiri, 1969). Classrooms are one of these groups, and many researchers over the past fifty years have worked to identify those aspects of the climate of classrooms that have the greatest impact on children's learning. These attempts have resulted in many classroom climate inventories for use in varied learning settings (Chavez, 1984).

One of these instruments, developed for elementary children and used with success from Kindergarten (Fuqua, 1984; Fuqua, 1985) through junior high school, is the My Class Inventory (Fraser & Fisher, 1983a). The My Class Inventory, or MCI, asks children questions about how

satisfied they are with their classroom and how difficult they feel the work to be. It also asks children about the friction, competition, and cohesion they think exists in their classroom.

These five dimensions, satisfaction, friction, competition, difficulty, and cohesion, were selected because climate research indicates that they are highly correlated with learning in classrooms (Fisher & Fraser, 1981; Fraser & Fisher, 1982a; Fraser & Fisher, 1983a). When children are satisfied with their classroom and perceive the work as less difficult, when they feel there is less competition for rewards, less friction between and among children and the teacher, and more cohesion and sense of group, they learn more content and they like school and the subject being taught more (Fisher & Fraser, 1981; Fraser & Fisher, 1982a; 1982b; Fraser & O'Brien, 1985; Talmage & Hart, 1977; Talmage & Walberg, 1978).

The research is very clear. When children perceive the climate as more positive, they learn more. Children feel better about themselves and other children, and about school in general. So why not begin investigating the effectiveness of schooling by asking the children how they feel.

Using the My Class Inventory

The short form of the MCI shown in Figure 1 (Fraser, 1982; Fraser & Fisher, 1983b) is the most appropriate climate instrument for young children. It consists of twenty-five statements, with five statements addressing each of the dimensions of satisfaction, friction, competition, difficulty, and cohesion (Fraser & Fisher, 1983b). The children read or, in the case of younger children or non-readers, an adult reads, each statement. With five-year-olds, the instrument is quite effective when an adult works individually with the children (Fuqua, 1984; Fuqua, 1985). The inventory is also valid for beginning readers if administered individually or in small groups.

Insert Figure 1 about here

When read to the child individually, the MCI takes about five minutes to administer (Fuqua, 1984; Fuqua, 1985). If read to children, it may be preferable for an adult other than the teacher to administer the instrument, so that children will feel freer to respond negatively or talk about problems in their classroom without worrying about hurting the teacher's feelings.

To complete the MCI, the child, or the adult administering the inventory, circles "yes" if the statement read describes her own classroom or "no" if it does not. To help clarify statements to younger children, the adult might change the statements to questions, saying, for example, "In your class, do the children enjoy their school?" I have also found that for American children, especially younger ones, changing the word "pupil" to children and "schoolwork" to work helps them understand.

In addition to a "yes" or "no" answer, collecting some qualitative data while talking with the children is very interesting. This can be done by asking children why? or who? This information can help the teacher identify problems and think about possible solutions.

To score the completed inventories, items are rated in the "Teacher Use" column. Items without the "R" in this column with a "yes" response are scored 3 (three). Those items without the "R" and with a "no" response are scored 1 (one). Those items with an "R" are scored in the reverse manner. This means that "R" items with a "yes" response receive a score of 1 (one) and those with a "no" response receive a score of 3 (three). Statements to which a child does not respond or those that are invalid because the child obviously does not understand, are scored 2 (two). An example of the scoring for satisfaction and cohesion is shown in Figure 1.

To get scale totals, the five scores for each item addressing that dimension are added. Items are arranged in cyclic order for this reason. The first, second, third, fourth, and fifth items in each block of five statements, respectively, measure satisfaction, friction, competition, difficulty, and cohesion. So, to obtain a score for satisfaction, one would add together the scores for items 1, 6, 11, 16, and 21. For a score for friction, the scores for items 2, 7, 12, 17, and 22 would be added, and so on. Totals for each scale are then recorded in the spaces provided at the bottom of the questionnaire. Scores for any one dimension will range from five to fifteen.

After all children in the class, or a random sampling of children, have responded to the inventory, scores for each scale can be averaged to provide a classroom climate profile for that classroom (Figure 2). This profile can then become beneficial in making changes to improve the climate of the classroom.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Using MCI Results to Improve Classrooms

A climate profile may reveal perceptions that are surprising. While you may strive to make your classroom non-competitive and insure success of all children, you may find that many children feel differently. This is the case in Mrs. Bradford's room (Figure 2). Although lessons are carefully planned, interactions warm, management efficient, MCI results in her classroom indicated that, while children feel satisfied, perceive little friction, find the group cohesive, and feel most children can do the work, they also perceive a fairly high level of competition.

Based on the MCI results and a careful look at classroom practices, you may form a tentative hypothesis on the reason for the children's feelings. One thing that Mrs. Bradford might reconsider is the management plan that involves putting children's names on the board and rewarding children whose names do not appear on the board during the week. Although she intends for this to be an individual management system, the same children often get their names on the board and do not receive the same praise and rewards as the other children. They know this, and all the other children know this. The children begin to believe that there simply aren't enough rewards for everyone and the system is perceived as competitive rather than individualistic (Fuqua, 1985).

Based on this hypothesis, Mrs. Bradford can begin to make changes (Fisher & Fraser, 1985; Fraser & Fisher, 1986; Fraser, Seddon, & Eagleson, 1982). In this case, she may stop putting children's names on the board and simply remind children individually. She may also rethink her reward system. She might elimate tangible rewards for behavior or make sure that all children are rewarded at some time creating a more balanced system.

Another way to address change with older children is to ask them to respond to the inventory twice. The first time they can respond based on how the classroom is. The second time they can respond based on the classroom that they would prefer (Fraser & Fisher, 1983b; Fraser & Fisher, 1983c; Hattie and others, 1986). Changes can be made based on the climate preferred by the children.

Using either approach, once changes have been implemented and have had time to become part of the daily routine of the classroom, the MCI can be repeated. A comparison of the first and second MCI profiles can indicate the effectiveness of the changes made.

No Time Like The Present

We know that children's perception of the classroom climate significantly influences the learning that occurs in that classroom. We also have a reliable and valid

instrument to measure young children's perception of their classroom's climate. By using the MCI, teachers can gather some very important information from a most important source: the children. Then, based on what the children say, changes can be made to improve the classroom climate, and ultimately to improve learning.

There's no time like the present to begin to ask the children and to explore the quality of the classroom climate. The MCI offers teachers one more objective measure with which to evaluate their classrooms. It offers one more way in which we can begin to make classrooms better places for children.

Figure 1

Short Form of the My Class Inventory
Illustrating Scoring for Satisfaction and Cohesion

NAME _____ SCHOOL _____ CLASS _____

Remember you are describing your actual classroom	Circle Your Answer	For Teacher's Use	*Remember you are describing your actual classroom*	Circle Your Answer	For Teacher Use
1. The pupils enjoy their schoolwork in my class.	(Yes) No	3	16. Some of the pupils don't like the class.	Yes (No)	R 3
2. Children are always fighting with each other.	Yes No		17. Certain pupils always want to have their own way.	Yes No	
3. Children often race to see who can finish first.	Yes No		18. Some pupils always try to do their work better than the others.	Yes No	
4. In our class the work is hard to do.	Yes No		19. Schoolwork is hard to do.	Yes No	
5. In my class everybody is my friend.	Yes (No)	1	20. All of the pupils in my class like one another.	(Yes) No	3
6. Some pupils are not happy in class.	(Yes) No	R 1	21. The class is fun.	Yes No	2
7. Some of the children in our class are mean.	Yes No		22. Children in our class fight a lot.	Yes No	
8. Most children want their work to be better than their friend's work.	Yes No		23. A few children in my class want to be first all of the time.	Yes No	
9. Most children can do their schoolwork without help.	Yes No	R	24. Most of the pupils in my class know how to do their work.	Yes No	R
10. Some people in my class are not my friends.	Yes (No)	R 3	25. Children in our class like each other as friends.	(Yes) No	3
11. Children seem to like the class.	Yes (No)	1			
12. Many children in our class like to fight.	Yes No				
13. Some pupils feel bad when they don't do as well as the others.	Yes No				
14. Only the smart pupils can do their work.	Yes No				
15. All pupils in my class are close friends.	(Yes) (No)	2			

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Fraser & Fisher, 1983b. MCI reprinted with written permission of Barry J. Fraser.

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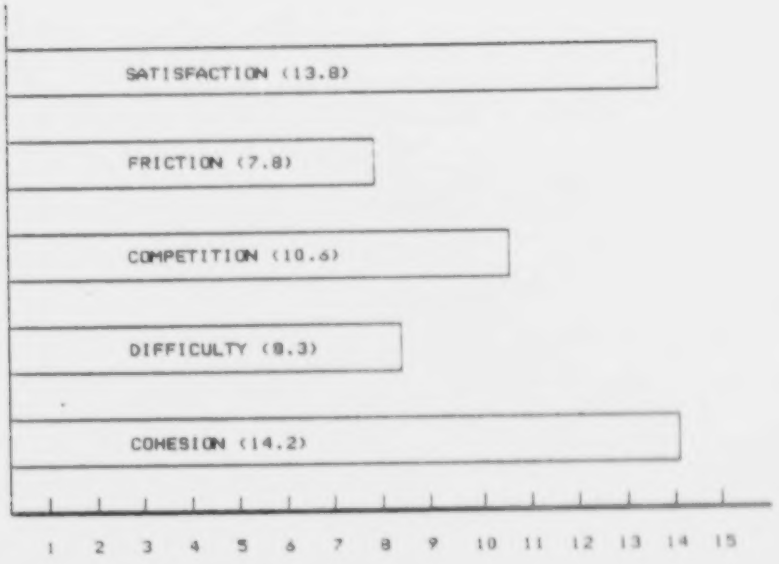
Figure 2

Profile of Mrs. Bradford's Classroom
Results of MCI



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